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MASSACHUSETTS LIBRARIES: AN ALLIANCE FOR THE FUTURE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

for

THE MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF LIBRARY COMMISSIONERS
648 Beacon Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02215

submitted by

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and

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

This Executive Summary briefly describes the results and recommendations of a major study of libraries in Massachusetts. The study was addressed to two main objectives:

- assessment of the current state of library services and library cooperative activities in Massachusetts, and
- recommendation of strategies to develop an action plan for the improvement of library services for the residents of Massachusetts.

The study was conducted through:

- surveys of 5 types of libraries (i.e., public, academic, school, institutional, and special),
- surveys of library users from 19 public libraries,
- cost finding studies of 16 public libraries,
- 114 in-depth interviews with members of the library community, and
- extensive analysis of secondary sources of data.

Supplemental to this Executive Summary are two reports: Massachusetts Libraries: An Alliance for the Future: Final report and Technical Report.

After careful analysis of the data collected, recommendations were addressed to the following areas:

- Resource sharing
- Library automation and networking
- Library support in small communities
- Preservation
- Role of the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners
- Funding
- Accountability
- Other specific recommendations

The recommendations take into account the fact that there are already significant library resources in Massachusetts. However, the purpose of the recommendations is to build upon the strength of these resources so that library services can be more efficient and effective in meeting the needs of Massachusetts residents. **To do this a statewide, multitype resource sharing structure is recommended.**

USEFULNESS AND VALUE OF LIBRARIES IN MASSACHUSETTS

Libraries are a marvelous invention. The concept of a community collectively acquiring books, periodicals, and other information to be shared by everyone in the community is a simple, but elegant, notion. What if there were no libraries? We estimate that it would cost public library users about eight times more than it costs the library to obtain the information from other sources and, furthermore, patrons would need to spend 1.4 hours more of their time in getting this information. In other libraries (i.e., academic and special), studies show it would cost users five to ten times more to obtain information if they did not have libraries. Thus, the investment by the communities served by libraries is clearly a good one from a direct economic standpoint. However, a far greater return on this investment is in the significant contribution that libraries make to lifelong learning, quality of life, and the community's economy.

There is abundant evidence of the importance of reading to all walks of life. For example in the workplace, recent studies have clearly shown that those who do more work-related reading are more productive and they are likely to make the greater contributions to

their organizations and society. One reason that reading is essential to success is that published knowledge is growing so rapidly -- all of the knowledge gained throughout the history of humankind, up to 1975, has now doubled and will double again in the next 15 to 17 years. This means that, at the time one graduates from college, one has been exposed to only one-sixth of all the knowledge that must be mastered during one's career. Thus, one of the principal objectives of education must be to teach students to learn how to learn. Furthermore, the educational process must provide knowledge of information tools and teach students the skills to use them. Library services are a key component in this arsenal of tools. Library use is found to be highly correlated with the success and performance of businessmen, scientists, engineers, lawyers, medical practitioners, educators, managers, and so on.

Unfortunately, there is disturbing evidence that we, as a society, are losing the ability to use the powerful tool of reading. Libraries can have a significant impact on stemming this trend, beginning with preschool children and continuing throughout formal education. Currently, there are nearly 34,000 children's literature and special programs presented annually in Massachusetts (2 per week per library). Children not only gain interest in books and reading as a result of these programs, they also are exposed to learning mechanisms that are found to be far better than television and other means. These formative years are critical to how the brain will form to process information for learning throughout life. At that point, school librarians pick up and teach research skills; media use and interpretation; critical thinking and problem solving skills; and library skills to apply information tools for lifelong learning and meeting other needs through life. School, academic, and public libraries all provide "information laboratories" for students at all levels to learn and apply their skills in using information tools. In Massachusetts, libraries are visited 34 million times annually for educational purposes.

The quality of life of Massachusetts' residents is also enhanced through extensive use of libraries. A great deal of public library use involves general reading for cultural enhancement. Another useful contribution to the quality of life is achieved through library use for solving day-to-day problems such as shopping, travelling, etc. (8.2 million visits), addressing personal family needs such as finance, illness, obtaining a job, alcohol or drug problems, etc. (7.3 million visits), and assisting with hobbies or other self-help activities such as carpentry, needlework, car repair, cooking, etc. (5.9 million visits). Public libraries in Massachusetts circulate over one-half million items to residents living in nursing homes or hospitals, and in underserved geographic areas. Nearly 100,000 residents are helped through special outreach programs such as literacy, job programs, etc., and thousands with visual, hearing, or physical impairments are assisted through special equipment or facilities.

Libraries make a contribution to the economy of Massachusetts by providing information to the public, students, teachers, and workers from all sectors far less expensively than any other alternative. Some are surprised at the extent to which public libraries support small businesses and even government agencies. Over four million visits to public libraries are by self-employed persons or those employed by small businesses which cannot afford all their needed library services. There are an additional 7.5 million work-related uses of public libraries by employees of other companies, government agencies and educational institutions. They use public libraries because public library resources are better and less expensive than any other alternative. Another contribution of libraries to the economy is that information provided by libraries results in performing day-to-day activities, work, education, and other endeavors better and less expensively. Use of information provided by public libraries in Massachusetts, for example, is shown to save patrons time or money in an appreciable proportion of self-help, work, and other purposes for which patrons visit the library. In the workplace, such savings have been found to average $100 per visit; applied to Massachusetts library use, the savings would be in the billion dollar range.

THE STATUS OF LIBRARIES IN MASSACHUSETTS

The 2,796 libraries in Massachusetts have a superb combined collection of over 72 million volumes. Collectively, these libraries are visited about 73 million times per year, or once a month per resident. These libraries cost over $330 million annually, but when considered on a cost per visit basis (less than a movie ticket) and when compared with their usefulness and value, the investment appears to be a sound one. Unfortunately, this investment does not accomplish all that it could in Massachusetts.

Until recently, public libraries in Massachusetts compared very well among public libraries in other states. The average income and expenditures were both well above national per capita averages and indicators of service have also been above national averages. Yet the past investments and substantial usefulness and value of the public libraries are now in serious jeopardy. For a time, public library income per capita, even when inflation is taken into account, increased from year to year. However, in the last three years, a peak has been reached and there is evidence of a decline. The standards set by the MBLC, incentives for achieving these standards, and other programs have placed Massachusetts public libraries in good stead in the past, but, these fine programs are now in disarray.

While the bleak outlook for public libraries is only recent, the picture for publicly-funded academic libraries could be called dismal at best. Funding and resources of the libraries of the 29 academic institutions funded by the Commonwealth are well below national medians. Massachusetts' publicly-funded academic libraries are consistently in the bottom half for average number of titles in the collection per student, average number of current serials subscriptions, and average number of library staff necessary to provide services. The low expenditures have resulted in extremely low numbers of titles in collections, current serials subscriptions and library staff necessary to provide services. In fact, using nine such measures, Massachusetts rates substantially below the median for all but one measure. Thus, caught in the current economic decline, it will take these libraries decades to catch up to national norms even if significant increases in funding were possible.

School libraries in Massachusetts are in an even worse situation. In 1986 and 1990 Massachusetts ranked 51st among the 50 states and the District of Columbia in library operating expenditures per student. Considered on a per student basis, Massachusetts school libraries are consistently ranked in the bottom 10 of the 50 states and District of Columbia for expenditures, collections, attendance, circulation, and so on. There are several factors, such as flexible scheduling, which are found to be related to the usefulness and success of school libraries, but in Massachusetts, school libraries are found to do poorly on most of these factors.

STATUS OF RESOURCE SHARING IN MASSACHUSETTS

Communities long ago learned to provide collections and services for their residents to share. However, among communities in Massachusetts there has been less willingness to share library resources than elsewhere. There are excellent library resource sharing programs in such states as Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, New York, and Pennsylvania, to name a few, that go well beyond the resource sharing done among Massachusetts libraries. These programs have been shown to provide better services to a broader range of users at less cost than would occur without resource sharing.

Although a substantial amount of resource sharing takes place in Massachusetts, it is not well coordinated and many services are redundant among service providers. Furthermore, the current resource sharing structure excludes many libraries by virtue of the communities served or their small size. Most of the formal emphasis on resource sharing in Massachusetts has involved public libraries through Regional Public Library Systems and Subregional contracting libraries, Automated Resource Sharing Networks, and the Library of Last Recourse. Basically, there is no formal resource sharing with school libraries; this is largely

due to the fact that there is no one responsible for coordinating these activities except at the local or school system level. In Massachusetts, even interlibrary borrowing among school libraries is only about 71,000; contrasted, for example, to well over one million in Pennsylvania which has a highly structured resource sharing system for school libraries. The publicly-funded academic libraries are organized through the Massachusetts Conference of Chief Librarians of Public Higher Educational Institutions (MCCLPHEI). Though effective, MCCLPHEI lacks the administrative authority and funding necessary to the implementation of a coordinated resource sharing program for its members. Some private academic libraries are involved in networks such as the Boston Library Consortium, but there is no Commonwealth-wide coordinating effort. Medical libraries belong to national resource sharing (through the National Library of Medicine), but neither they nor other special libraries have any formal coordinating body. The Department of Corrections has a coordinating director, but coordination among other institutional libraries is non-existent.

Most states have adopted multitype library resource sharing strategies in which school, academic, public, institutional, and special libraries all participate. This type of resource sharing is less expensive because of "economies of scale," which means that services can be provided at less cost (per unit) when more services are provided. For example, an average interlibrary loans costs $13.50 per loan in libraries where there are fewer than 1,000 loans, but only $4.10 when more than 10,000 loans are made. Such savings are obtained by spreading large fixed (capital) costs of computers, systems, etc. across more units and by negotiating volume discounts with vendors. Some services, such as interlibrary lending, can be done less expensively on a "production" basis than piecemeal. For many resource sharing services, the costs are as low as one-fourth the cost of doing them independently.

There are basically five types of resource sharing currently taking place in Massachusetts: 3 Regional Public Library Systems (with 13 contracting libraries), The Library of Last Recourse, 11 Automated Resource Sharing Networks, other formal and informal resource sharing, and consultant and other Commonwealth services provided by the staff of MBLC. The Regional Public Library Systems provide interlibrary lending, reference services, delivery, centralized purchasing of supplies, bookmobile services and deposit collections, technical services support, technical assistance, and other services. The types and amounts of services vary among Regions because of the wide disparity of environments and library support needs.

Boston Public Library (BPL) has been designated the **Library of Last Recourse**. The principal service is access to an exceptional collection of research, business, and other scholarly materials. Services include delivery and circulation of research materials for use within any library across the state.

The basic concept behind Automated Resource Sharing Networks is for groups of libraries to cost-effectively utilize automated bibliographic databases through sharing centralized computers and databases. There are six basic services now being provided by these centers: cataloging, automated circulation, online public access catalog (OPAC), interlibrary lending (request processing), search services, and acquisitions.

Another important resource sharing center is **The Boston Library Consortium** which serves a cooperative association of eleven academic and research libraries (including Boston Public Library and the State Library). In addition, there are many other formal and less formal library resource sharing activities taking place throughout Massachusetts. Resource sharing is also done through NELINET (OCLC), Research Library Network (RLN), Fenway Library Consortium, Worcester Area Cooperating Libraries (WACL), Southeastern Massachusetts Cooperating Libraries (SMCL), Boston Theological Institutes, Northeast Depository Library, Northeastern Consortium of Law Libraries, among other formal groups, and several informal groups of libraries formed to provide cooperative purchasing.

The **Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners** provides resource sharing center through consulting and other services. Certain consulting services should be provided on a Commonwealth-wide basis, and it is appropriate for MBLC to provide such services. The

MBLC also provides coordination of programs with and among school media centers, public, academic, special, institutional libraries, and libraries serving the handicapped.

While a great deal of resource sharing is taking place in Massachusetts, there is considerably more that can be done to achieve substantially greater economies and/or to provide better services. Small public, school, and other libraries can benefit far more, additional libraries should be taking advantage of automation, and there should be better coordination of resource sharing now being performed by Regional Public Library Systems, Automated Resource Sharing Networks, and the Library of Last Recourse. All three provide some level of interlibrary lending and the Regional Systems and Library of Last Recourse provide reference referral. Clearly, there needs to be coordination as to which interlibrary loan processing and reference referral should be done locally as opposed to on a Commonwealth-wide basis so that resources can be optimally used. Below is a set of recommendations that we believe will provide a structure and strategies for extending resource sharing and achieving it more efficiently than is currently being done.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Lack of coordination and redundancy of resource sharing can be addressed by restructuring current entities and services. Our primary recommendation is to replace the three current Regions with "Library Cooperatives" covering six to twelve smaller geographic areas. These Library Cooperatives would offer a full range of resource sharing services to all libraries in their respective geographic areas. We emphasize that not all service offerings are likely to be of interest to every type of library, nor to libraries of all sizes. However, there are some core services that should be provided by every Library Cooperative. Interlibrary lending (and ILL request processing services), reciprocal borrowing and/or in-house library access, access to solid reference collections and reference referral, and delivery should be extended to all libraries for the benefit of their patrons. These services should be largely funded by the Commonwealth through MBLC. Otherwise, central processing of services (automated and non-automated) should be provided to those desiring them and willing to pay for them. These services would include automated circulation control and other automated services, cooperative purchasing to achieve vendor discounts, acquisitions, cataloging, and so on. Furthermore, a range of outreach, consulting, and continuing education programs should be made available to those libraries desiring them. We emphasize that not all services need be actually "produced" by the Library Cooperative, but that the Cooperative must, at minimum, provide access to them through a vendor or library under contract.

There are questions of how many Library Cooperatives there ought to be and what happens to existing resource sharing entities? The optimum size of a Library Cooperative requires that a balance be struck between conflicting factors. For example, the number of members or participants should be small enough to have a manageable governance. Yet, there must be enough activity to achieve economies of scale. A balance of these two factors falls in the range of 50 to 200 members or participating libraries. Not all 2,796 libraries in Massachusetts are likely to be involved, and many will want to participate only in core resource sharing services. With this in mind, about six to twelve Library Cooperatives seems about the right number. The evolution could involve a Region expanding its services to all types of libraries within its geographic area or an Automated Network providing an extended range of services beyond current automated services. A Subregional library could form a nucleus by expanding the range of libraries served and by increasing services offered. One suggested configuration which might be used as a starting point for discussion of a multitype library resource sharing structure in Massachusetts is as follows:

- The Western Region become a Library Cooperative.

- The Central Region could become one or two Library Cooperatives based around Worcester and Fitchburg.

- In the Eastern region, several Library Cooperatives would be formed, based on the similar automated systems used by the automated resource sharing networks in contiguous geographic areas. This would result in the following Library Cooperatives in what is currently the Eastern region:
  - one or more from ABLE, OCLN, SEAL (all utilizing the DYNIX system)
  - CLAMS (all utilizing DRA system, but not contiguous with other DRA networks)
  - one or more from Metro-Boston, MLN, FLO, University of Lowell (all DRA)
  - MVLC, and/or NOBLE (both utilizing the CLSI system)

In this suggested configuration, the Library Cooperatives could arrange for libraries currently in the Western and Central regions to continue to have their automated services provided through C/W MARS.

Interlibrary cooperation and resource sharing can be enhanced through the appropriate application of new information technologies. One of the factors which has contributed to successful library resource sharing in other states is the existence of a statewide telecommunications infrastructure. Massachusetts has the backbone for such an infrastructure in MassNet (which is evolving from the Regents Computer Network). MassNet needs to continue to grow and expand, and more and more libraries need access and interconnections to the network.

In a related development for libraries, a new protocol/standard is under development by the National Standards Organization (NISO 739.50). This protocol/standard, when implemented, will enable the users of automated library systems to search the online catalogs of other libraries using other automated systems as if they were their own libraries' catalog. Also important in cooperation in a networked environment is the open systems interconnections which will facilitate different systems to interconnect at many levels (physical data stream, operating system, applications, etc.). Progress on the development of these standards needs to be monitored and they should be adopted and implemented when available.

Finally, there is an on-going debate about whether the future of automated library catalogs lies in online access or access via CD-ROM. While access to some types of CD-ROM databases may be advantageous (from an economic perspective), it offers considerably less information than its online counterparts. Online catalogs, when implemented as part of an integrated library system, offers current availability information on every item in the catalog. This is extremely important for resource sharing.

Two strong themes come from the library community that concern the role of MBLC. One theme is that there needs to be an "umbrella" organization concerned and responsible for all types of libraries in Massachusetts. Many non-public libraries feel disenfranchised in Massachusetts. We believe that the MBLC is the appropriate agency to assume this role. A theme more directed to MBLC is that it should assume a stronger leadership role in representing libraries regarding future change, legislation, and funding. We further believe that MBLC should fund the following kinds of resource sharing functions and specific services:

- one-time development of resource sharing options, systems and services such as planning and development of the Library Cooperatives, specific automated systems, gateway systems and so on;
- services in which resource sharing benefits all libraries, but costs are disproportionately high for a few libraries such as with net lending, reference and research services, and delivery;
- when a special population is served (e.g., inmates, nursing homes, etc.) or when specific services are needed (e.g., literacy programs for non-English speaking residents); and

- when a needed service has infrequent use such as with some consulting services that can best be accomplished at a state-wide level (i.e., by MBLC staff or through contract).

Funding for these resource sharing services does not preclude Direct Aid to libraries in order to provide incentives to meet meaningful standards.

Following are 22 specific recommendations offered to begin building **An Alliance for the Future in Massachusetts.**

RECOMMENDATION 1: Statewide resource sharing should be based on the coordination and encouragement of a variety of resource sharing activities between and among all types of libraries across the Commonwealth.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The role of the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners should be as a coordinator of cooperative initiatives and supporter of activities and services which would benefit the entire Massachusetts library community.

RECOMMENDATION 3: An Interlibrary Cooperation group should be established within the MBLC to assume responsibility for coordinating library cooperation in the Commonwealth.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The Network Advisory Committee should be expanded, or a new Advisory Council formed, to include representation of all cooperative resource sharing efforts (i.e., not just automation). The purpose of the Council is to ensure that the interests and concerns of the entire Massachusetts library community are incorporated into planning future cooperative efforts.

RECOMMENDATION 5: A Massachusetts Library Resource Sharing Policy Board should be established to specifically address resource sharing issues. Their recommendations would be forwarded to the MBLC for final ratification and approval.

RECOMMENDATION 6: The three current regions should be replaced with six to twelve "Library Cooperatives" to offer an integrated range of resource sharing services to all libraries in their area. Such services would include access to collections, reference and research, automation services, operational services, delivery, outreach, consulting, continuing eduction among other services. Basic funding for the Library Cooperatives should come from the Commonwealth (MBLC) and the remaining funds should come from cost recovery of services used by member libraries.

RECOMMENDATION 8: MBLC should actively participate in a further study on the feasibility and design of a common educational network in the Commonwealth which would serve libraries, higher education, and K-12 schools.

RECOMMENDATION 7: MBLC should work closely with the automated resource sharing networks to develop a proposal for using MassNet for linking the automated library systems of the resource sharing networks and, potentially other automated library systems in the Commonwealth.

RECOMMENDATION 9: The automated resource sharing networks and MBLC, through the Network Advisory Council, should determine the interest of member libraries in access to databases and enter into discussions of a pilot project to evaluate network access with the respective database publishers.

RECOMMENDATION 10: The Library Cooperatives should plan their services to support small community (i.e., those serving fewer than 10,000 population) library needs to the greatest degree possible, although not to the exclusion of large community needs.

RECOMMENDATION 11: The MBLC and other agencies should continue to examine and plan a sound Commonwealth-wide preservation program.

RECOMMENDATION 12: The function of cooperation among school libraries and between school libraries and other types of libraries should be delegated to the MBLC with appropriate funding by the Department of Education for Library Cooperative participation and administration.

RECOMMENDATION 13: The MBLC's statutory mandate to develop school library media services should be reestablished by reinstating the language (or language now deemed more appropriate) of Section 19E Paragraph 3.

RECOMMENDATION 14: The MBLC should assume a stronger role and responsibility in directing how existing and new Commonwealth and Federal funds are used to assure that residents of the Commonwealth receive the best possible library service.

RECOMMENDATION 15: The MBLC should develop accountability mechanisms, instruments and definitions for Library Cooperatives, Library of Last Recourse, and other funded projects.

RECOMMENDATION 16: The MBLC should develop a five-year plan for its own mission, goals, measurable objectives and strategies for change regarding implementation of the LSCA Plan.

RECOMMENDATION 17: The MBLC should develop a long-range program for addressing the funding for all types of libraries in Massachusetts including funds for reciprocal borrowing and interlibrary lending, seed money for cooperative projects involving all types of libraries, an appropriate state share of the ongoing costs of operating the cooperatives, support for libraries that meet standards, support for the LLR, and support for the MBLC and the agencies it serves directly.

RECOMMENDATION 18: The MBLC should spearhead a widespread public education program that highlights the importance, usefulness and value of libraries.

RECOMMENDATION 19: Plans for Library Cooperatives that are submitted to MBLC should include a clear statement of how accountability to their members and to MBLC will be achieved, and what the cost will be to provide such accountability.

RECOMMENDATION 20: All entities receiving funds administered by the MBLC (Library of Last Recourse, Regional Contracting Libraries, Library Cooperatives, and others) should be held to higher standards of accountability than are presently required. Accountability should be measured by a series of agreed upon standard output measures to be reported to the MBLC and to users of the service on a regular basis.

RECOMMENDATION 21: The recommendations in Learning at Risk, the **Standards for School Library Media Centers in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts** and the results from the 1991 White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services should be adopted to the degree they are compatible with the recommendations of this report.

RECOMMENDATION 22: The institutional and special library communities should develop similar working documents (as **Learning at Risk**) for their libraries.